



STATE OF WASHINGTON
WASHINGTON STATE BOARD OF HEALTH
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News Release

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Art, Science, and Public Health Policy Converge as State Task Force Discusses the Future of Genomics

Friday, April 12, 9:15 a.m.–5 p.m., Walker Ames Room, Kane Hall, University of Washington, Seattle

A state task force on genetics meets Friday, April 12 at the University of Washington to hear from scientists, public health leaders, and biotechnology companies about the future of human genetics. The group will also tour Gene(sis), an exhibit at the Henry Art Gallery that explores the social, emotional, and ethical implications of recent advances in genetics.

“The work of this group is at the heart of the entire genetics debate,” said Linda Lake, chair of the 22-member Genetics Task Force, which the State Board of Health convened in January at the direction of the Legislature. “Society recognizes the potential advantage of progress, but has concerns about the price of that progress. Our job as a task force is to recommend actions the Legislature can take to avoid the worst costs—discrimination, abridged privacy, aborted progress in medical science.”

People who will be testifying April 12 about future directions for academic research, public health policy, and private biotechnology ventures include:

- Ken Thummel, Department of Pharmaceutics, University of Washington
- Maxine Hayes, State Health Officer, Department of Health
- Karen Edwards, Director, University of Washington Center for Genomics and Public Health
- Amy Klein, Director of Genetics, Association of State and Territorial Health Officers
- Eric Earling, Director of Public and Governmental Affairs, Washington Biotechnology and Biomedical Association
- Steve Gilbert, Director, Institute of Neurotoxicology and Neurological Disorders

Task force members will tour Gene(sis) during lunch. “The Henry’s exhibit definitely rings a warning note,” said Lake, who also chairs the State Board of Health. “We have to think about how we can heed the warnings but not rob society of the promise of the technology and the science. We’re asking task force members not just to uphold their own positions, but to learn from others, and look at broader societal issues, not just the issues of their own practice, research, or commercial enterprise.”

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The Gene(sis) art exhibition and associated public programs are the culmination of a three-year collaborative endeavor involving a working group of artists, scientists, historians, bioethicists, biotechnology industry representatives and museum professionals engaged in a dialogue about the potential meaning and impact of current genomic research and development on our understanding of human life and identity.

The task force will also begin discussing what kind of information, conclusions and recommendations it should include in its final report. This will be the third of five scheduled meetings for the 22-member group. The Legislature has directed the committee to report any findings by October 2002.

Copies of the agenda and related materials are available by contacting the Board of Health at (360) 236-4110 or by visiting the Board's Web site at www.doh.wa.gov/sboh/priorities/genetics/genetics.htm.

Information about Gene(sis) can be viewed on line at www.henryart.org.

The State Board of Health serves the citizens of Washington by working to understand and prevent disease across the entire population. Established in 1889 by the State Constitution, the Board provides leadership by suggesting public health policies and actions, by regulating certain activities, and by providing a public forum. The governor appoints ten members who fill three-year terms. Visit the board's Web site at www.doh.wa.gov/sboh.

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